Lilydale Progressive M.B. Church

(originally First Reformed Church of Roseland)
10706 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Preliminary Staff Summary of Information
Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks
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LILYDALE PROGRESSIVE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
(originally First Reformed Church of Roseland)
10706 South Michigan Avenue
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Date of Construction: 1887

Builders: Henrik De Jong and Jan Kleinhuizen

Handsome and impressive, the house of religious worship located at the corner of 107th Street and Michigan Avenue signifies a continuum of congregational life stretching back well over a century. Now housing the Lilydale Progressive M.B. Church, the building was originally constructed in 1887 as the First Reformed Church of Roseland by the early Dutch settlers of this Far South Side community area.

Early History of Roseland

In 1889, the annexation of both the Town of Lake and the Village of Hyde Park brought Roseland inside Chicago's city limits. Little short of a half century before this, Roseland had been undeveloped but fertile swampy soil with occasional patches of dry prairie traversed by a high ridge on which ran Thornton Road (now Michigan Avenue). In 1849, a group of Dutch families from the district between Amsterdam and Rotterdam in Holland, in search of arable land for truck farming, founded a settlement along this ridge between 103rd and 111th streets. Becoming known as the "Hollanders of the High Prairie," they cultivated cabbage, cauliflower, beets carrots, potatoes, and tomatoes which they sold at Chicago's South Water Street market. As well as produce, the farmers also grew flowers, and the annual lavish display, especially of red roses, led to the adoption of the name of Roseland in the 1870s. At the time the first post office was opened in 1861, the name of the village had been Hope. For much of the nineteenth century, Roseland retained its pastoral character and European identity, as A. T. Andreas described in his 1884 *History of Cook County, Illinois*:

> Its inhabitants are the sturdy, phlegmatic, industrious, natives of Holland; and standing by some of the little, squat, small-windowed houses, hearing the high-Dutch gutterals, seeing the pollards and rectangular inclosures, the square-faced, wooden-shoed, tow-headed little Dutchmen; in fact, ob-

serving the "tout ensemble" would cause one to fancy themselves rather near Amsterdam, or in primitive Nieuw Amsterdam rather than fifteen miles from Chicago.

Andreas included biographical sketches of Roseland's leading citizens in his book. Among them was one on Henrik De Jong of "De Jong and Kleinhuizen, contractors and builders, and dealers in sash doors, blinds, and mouldings." This firm, established in 1882, was responsible for the construction of the First Reformed Church of Roseland. The church was the fourth and final building to be erected at the southwest corner of 107th and Michigan Avenue, the original site chosen for this purpose.

One of the very first endeavors of the Dutch immigrants had been to organize a church. In August, 1849, a group of eighteen charter members with one elder, Jacob De Jong, a deacon, Pieter De Jong, and the Reverend W. C. Wust began holding services in the barn of Klaas Dalenberg. In 1850, the first small plain wooden building was completed. In 1856, the church was enlarged and then in 1867 another church was erected, enhanced by a steeple containing a church bell. The present structure was dedicated on January 20, 1888. Originally the church had its own burial ground adjacent on the north until about 1888 when the extension of 107th Street necessitated the transfer of the remains, the majority of which were reinterred in Mount Greenwood Cemetery.

The Architectural Style of the Church

The Lilydale Progressive M.B. Church is entirely characteristic of the style known as Romanesque Revival which was widely popular in the United States for church and other types of institutional architecture from approximately 1840 to 1900. It enjoyed notable favor particularly with such denominations as the Congregationalists, Methodists, and Baptists as opposed to the Gothic Revival which was generally preferred by the Roman Catholics and Episcopalians. The Romanesque Revival hallmarks of a monochromatic brick building material highlighted by the semi-circular arch for door and window openings are found in abundance at Lilydale. The repetition of the arch creates a pleasing rhythmic surface patterning in lieu of grand or ornate applied decoration. This would be most appealing to the practical and unpretentious Dutch farmers who first worshipped in this church. In Romanesque Revival churches, the facade with its sharply pointed gable nave was always flanked by towers of differing heights and covered by various roof forms. The strong, square silhouette of Lilydale's bell tower is capped by a pyramidal spire. A unique feature at Lilydale is the opposite flanking mini-tower, here topped by a stepped gable reminiscent of the treatment seen on Dutch houses which lined the canals in Holland. Restrained and understated, the Lilydale Church conveys a feeling of beauty just because of its simplicity.

The interior of Lilydale too bespeaks a tradition of ecclesiastical architecture which started with the Protestant Reformation. In his 1985 book, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, Spiro Kostof notes some of the changes that occurred in the break from Catholicism:

> The chief liturgical center is now the pulpit. The chancel with its lavish, fixed altar is rejected as quintessentially popish. . . . In the new churches the people gather about the pulpit and the movable altar, and the minister leads the service from this position. . . . In architectural terms this means a shift from a processional to an auditorium space, from a longitudinal to a centralizing plan.

Kostof also made another observation which certainly is true of the Lilydale Church as built by the Dutch. He says: "There was no stained glass, sculpture, retable, or other such ornaments, although the organs in the otherwise very austere Dutch church interiors can be quite sumptuous."

At Lilydale, the organ is especially noteworthy with its striking colors and elaborate format. Installed in the church in 1903 after an intensive fund-raising campaign, the instrument at the time was the largest pipe organ in that section of Chicago. The *Ninetieth Anniversary Historical Booklet and Directory*, published by the First Reformed Church of Roseland in 1939, explains:

> The committee was intent upon obtaining an organ that could be heard above the congregational singing and that objective was attained. One cannot but be impressed with the rare beauty of its front design and the original color combination of its display pipes. The organ has thirty stops and over one thousand speaking pipes.

Another significant feature of Lilydale's interior worship space is the highly polished, dark oak ceiling framing.

The Lilydale Progressive Missionary Baptist Church

The name "Lilydale" refers to a settlement of Black homeowners which came into existence in Roseland between 1910 and 1920. Dempsey J. Travis, in his 1981 book, *An Autobiography of Black Chicago*, in discussing Black residential patterns during the 1920s, says.

> Some of the old settlers, in an effort to escape the influx of Southern migrants, relocated in areas that were a long ride away via the interurban street car. Morgan Park attracted middle-middle-income Blacks, that is, middle-middle on the scale of black employment opportunities--clerks, Pullman porters, dining car waiters and semi-skilled laborers. Lilydale and Robbins attracted lower-middle class Blacks in search of space to rear large families. Both Robbins and Lilydale have dramatically improved the quality of their housing stock within the past twenty years.

Among the Christian denominations, the Baptist religion has always been one of the

main faiths of the Black community, for whom the church has always been one of the most central and well supported institutions. Baptists have always been leaders in the progress of the Blacks in education, civil rights, and missionary outreach. The Lilydale Progressive M.B. Church was started in October, 1913, by the Reverend D. C. Trice, Deacon John Ford, and Sister Mary Johnson in whose home services were first held. A church home at 41 West 95th Street was established on property donated by Sister Mary Johnson. From these early days, due to the strength and caring of successive very able pastors, Lilydale has grown numerically and financially, celebrating its 75th anniversary in 1988. It was under the tenure of the Reverend L. R. Jackson, who served for twenty-six years from 1958 until 1984, that the church acquired the property at 10706 South Michigan Avenue. The church was purchased in 1971 at a cost of $200,000 with a down payment of $125,000 and a mortgage of $75,000 which was paid off in a record seventeen months, testifying to the commitment of the membership. Since its acquisition, the congregation has exercised sound stewardship in maintaining and upgrading this venerable old building.

With ties to two important ethnic components of Roseland, the Lilydale Progressive M.B. Church exemplifies a significant aspect of the religious and social history of Chicago. At a time when the preservation of religious structures is a critical issue, the Lilydale Church stands out as a prime example of how a key religious building can function as a visible and enduring sign of community hope and neighborhood stability.

Built in 1887 by the Dutch parishioners of the First Reformed Church of Roseland, the Romanesque Revival church at the corner of 107th and Michigan Avenue now houses the Black congregation of the Lilydale Progressive Missionary Baptist Church.

(Timothy Wittman, photographer for the Chicago Historic Resources Survey)

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Additional research material used in the preparation of this report is on file at the office of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and is available to the public.

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Staff for this Publication

Meredith Taussig, *research and writing*
Janice Curtis, *production assistant*

Survey Documentation - 9th Ward

Timothy Wittman
Gwen Sommers Yant

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773.
929-2646

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to the designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from the qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.

The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. This preliminary summary of information has been prepared by the Commission staff and was submitted to the Commission when it initiated consideration of the historical and architectural qualities of this potential landmark.

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320 North Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois 60610
(312) 744-3200